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TITLE OF THE INVENTION:

METHOD AND UNIT FOR CHANGING THE CONFIGURATION OF AN
AUTOMATIC MACHINE

10 The present invention relates to a method of
changing the configuration of an automatic machine.

 The present invention may be used to particular
advantage on automatic cigarette packing machines, to
which the following description refers purely by way of
15 example.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

 The work configuration of known cigarette packing
machines is increasingly subject to change to adapt
production to current market requirements.

20 Work configuration changes normally comprise brand
changes, in which the size of the finished packet remains
the same and changes are made to the type of packing
material or the location of any labels; and format
changes, in which the size of the finished packet is also
25 changed.

 Both brand and format changes normally call for
operator intervention on the packing machine, to
calibrate or change mechanical parts and make electrical

adjustments to the machine.

When making brand or format changes, the skill and experience of the operator are decisive in determining finished packet quality and smooth start-up of the machine. So, to ensure a high degree of efficiency of the machine, the operator must be trained regularly, at considerable cost to the firm.

Moreover, notwithstanding the skill of the operator, both brand and format changes are relatively painstaking jobs, in view of the potential damage involved in the event of errors or omissions on the part of the operator.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method of changing the configuration of an automatic machine, designed to eliminate the aforementioned drawbacks, and which at the same time is cheap and easy to implement.

According to the present invention, there is provided a method of changing the configuration of an automatic machine comprising a display device and a selection device; a user selecting a desired end configuration by means of the selection device; and the method being characterized by displaying, by means of the display device, an orderly list of the operations to be performed on the automatic machine to convert the automatic machine from a current start configuration to said desired end configuration.

The present invention also relates to a unit for

changing the configuration of an automatic machine.

According to the present invention, there is provided a unit for changing the configuration of an automatic machine; the unit comprising selection means
 5 whereby a user selects a desired end configuration; and the unit being characterized by comprising display means for displaying an orderly list of the operations to be performed on the machine to convert the machine from a current start configuration to the desired end
 10 configuration.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A non-limiting embodiment of the present invention will be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

15 Figure 1 shows a schematic front view of a cigarette packing machine featuring the unit according to the present invention;

Figures 2, 3 and 4 show, schematically, the displays shown at successive operating instants by a display
 20 device of the Figure 1 unit.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Number 1 in Figure 1 indicates as a whole an automatic packing machine for producing packets 2 of cigarettes. Packing machine 1 is substantially known and,
 25 for example, of the type known commercially as "X500" and produced by G.D. S.p.A.

Packing machine 1 is equipped with a control unit 3 housed in a cabinet 4 located close to and connected to

packing machine 1 over cables (not shown).

Control unit 3 also performs the functions of a user-interface or so-called "HMI" device, and therefore integrates a known industrial computer having a data display screen 5 and a keying device 6, which is normally defined by a keyboard and/or pointing device. Alternatively, keying device 6 may be integrated in screen 5 in the form of a so-called "touch-screen".

Packing machine 1 comprises a number of known operating devices (not shown individually), which are controlled by control unit 3, and each of which performs a given function.

Packing machine 1 is designed to produce various types of packets 2 of cigarettes, which differ according to the type of packing material used (in particular, the graphics printed on the packing material) and/or in size. To produce each type of packet 2, packing machine 1 must be set to a respective work configuration C corresponding to a given configuration of the aforementioned operating devices, and to a corresponding configuration of the operating parameters of control unit 3.

To change the type of packet 2 produced on packing machine 1, the work configuration C of packing machine 1 must therefore be changed from a current start configuration C1 to a desired end configuration C2.

As regards control unit 3, changing work configuration C involves, as is known, memorizing new control unit 3 operating parameters relative to the new

desired end configuration C2.

As regards the operating devices of automatic machine 1, on the other hand, changing work configuration C calls for performing certain technical operations - mechanical or electrical, calibrations, adjustments or replacements - on at least some of the operating devices of packing machine 1; each of which technical operations involves performing a sequence of given elementary operations.

Each operating device on packing machine 1 can, in fact, operate in various modes, each of which is assigned and identified by a respective operating value VF, so that each work configuration C of packing machine 1 corresponds to a given set of operating device operating values VF.

For example, an operating value VF may indicate the identification code of a part to be changed, or the state of a setting to be changed when changing work configuration C.

Changing work configuration C of packing machine 1 therefore involves performing certain technical operations on some of the operating devices to change some of the respective operating values VF from respective start states typical of current start configuration C1, to respective end states typical of the desired end configuration C2.

In a known memory (not shown) of control unit 3 is stored a database DBC of the work configurations of

packing machine 1, in which each work configuration C is assigned a respective name (e.g. "Type01", "Type02", "Type03".....), a description string, an image of the packet 2 corresponding to the work configuration, and a
5 list of the respective operating value VF states corresponding to the work configuration C.

The same known memory (not shown) of control unit 3 also stores an operation database DBI, which assigns each operating value VF a corresponding technical operation to
10 be performed by the operator on packing machine 1 to change the operating value VF.

Each technical operation is assigned a respective name (e.g. "Outer guide height", "Inner guide height"), possibly a text string describing the technical
15 operation, and a set of help procedures, each corresponding to an elementary operation defining the technical operation itself. Each help procedure comprises a text string and a photo and/or video showing how the elementary operation is to be performed.

20 In actual use, to change work configuration C, the operator selects, in known manner using keying device 6, an "assisted configuration change" procedure mainly designed for unskilled operators, or a "standard configuration change" procedure mainly designed for
25 skilled operators.

When the "assisted configuration change" procedure is selected, screen 5 shows a configuration C selection display 7 as shown in Figure 2, and which shows the name

8 of the current configuration C1 ("Type01" string in Figure 2), and a name 9 of a desired configuration C2 ("Type17" string in Figure 2) which can be selected by the operator from a list 10 of work configurations C contained in database DBC. For both the current and desired configurations C1 and C2, the configuration C selection display 7 shows a respective description string 11 and a respective image 12 of the packet 2 corresponding to the work configuration C1, C2.

10 When the desired work configuration C2 is selected by the operator, screen 5 shows a summary display 13 as shown in Figure 3, and which shows an orderly list 14 of all and only the technical operations to be performed on automatic machine 1 to convert automatic machine 1 from the current start configuration C1 to the desired end configuration C2. More specifically, list 14 is arranged according to the sequence in which the technical operations are to be performed.

Each technical operation in list 14 is accompanied by a name string 15 of the technical operation itself, the state 16 of at least one respective operating value VF in the start configuration C1 ("Type01"), and the state 17 of the same operating value VF in the end configuration C2 ("Type17").

25 Control unit 3 compiles list 14 from configuration database DBC, and enters into list 14 all and only the operating values VF having different states in the current start configuration C1 and the desired end

configuration C2. Control unit 3 also uses operation
database DBI, which assigns each operating value VF the
corresponding technical operation to be performed by the
operator on packing machine 1 to change the operating
5 value VF.

Each technical operation in list 14 can be selected
individually in known manner to obtain a detail display
18 as shown in Figure 4, and which shows, for the
selected technical operation, a name string 19 and an
10 orderly list 20 of elementary operations to be performed
to carry out the technical operation. The technical
operation in detail display 18 may also be accompanied by
a text description.

When an elementary operation is selected by the
15 operator in known manner from list 20 (e.g. elementary
operation "3" in the Figure 4 detail display 18), the
display shows a respective text description 21, a
respective photographic image in a window 22, and a
respective video film, preferably with sound, in a window
20 23. The video film can be controlled in known manner by
means of push-buttons 24 associated with window 23.

List 20 comprises a number of push-buttons 25
(numbered 1 to 10), only some of which (numbered 1 to 7)
are selectable by actually corresponding to respective
25 elementary operations, while the others (numbered 8 to
10) are not selectable by not corresponding to respective
elementary operations.

By way of an alternative to the above operating

mode, when the "assisted configuration change" procedure is selected and the operator selects the desired work configuration C2 on the Figure 2 selection display 7, screen 5, as opposed to showing the Figure 3 summary display 13, goes straight to the detail display 18 of the first technical operation in list 14.

Starting with the detail display 18 of the first technical operation, the operator is shown successively and in known manner the detail displays 18 of all the technical operations in list 14. More specifically, before going on to the next technical operation display, the operator must first confirm performance of each technical operation in list 14.

The operator is therefore guided through the sequence of technical operations and at the same time instructed in how to perform each elementary operation, thus ensuring all the technical operations required to change the selected work configuration C are performed by the operator in the correct sequence and with no omissions. Moreover, since each technical operation is also assigned an operating value VF, each adjustment or replacement is based on objective data to be conformed with, as opposed to depending on the skill of the operator.

At the end of the "assisted configuration change" procedure, regardless of whether or not the Figure 3 summary display 13 is shown, the operator informs control unit 3 in known manner that all the technical operations

in list 14 have been completed, and the configuration change procedure is terminated by loading the new operating parameters of control unit 3 relative to the desired end configuration C2 into the memory of control unit 3.

The "standard configuration change" procedure differs from the "assisted configuration change" procedure by not displaying the technical operations to be performed to change work configuration C upon the operator selecting desired work configuration C2. The configuration change procedure, in fact, is terminated immediately by loading the new operating parameters of control unit 3 relative to the desired end configuration C2 into the memory of control unit 3.

The operators of automatic machine 1 are normally authorized to use the "assisted configuration change" and "standard configuration change" procedures, but not to change the content of configuration database DBC, operation database DBI, and any other information displayed during the "assisted configuration change" procedure.

Such changes can only be made by specific technical personnel, normally plant maintenance technicians, with the necessary skill and experience to ensure any changes are made correctly.

More specifically, whereas routine operators of automatic machine 1 are allowed read-only access to displays 7, 13 and 18, maintenance technicians of

automatic machine 1, by entering one or more passwords, are allowed both read and change access to displays 7', 13' and 18', similar to respective displays 7, 13 and 18, to update all the data displayed on screen 5.

5 In actual use, to change the state 16 of an operating value VF or a technical operation help procedure, the operator having an update permission is given access to a selection display 7', in which, besides selecting current start configuration C1 and desired end
10 configuration C2, it is also possible to change description string 11 and image 12 of configuration C2.

Screen 5 then shows a summary display 13' containing an orderly list 14' of all the technical operations to be performed on automatic machine 1, together with the
15 respective operating values VF.

The operator, on selecting a technical operation from list 14' in known manner, is given access to detail display 18', in which all the data displayed on screen 5 can be changed.

20 More specifically, changes can be made to state 17 of operating value VF of end configuration C2, to technical operation name string 19, and to the data of each elementary operation associated with the technical operation. Each push-button 25 in list 20 can be
25 activated to assign a respective elementary operation to that particular push-button 25, or can be deactivated to cancel the previously set association. Changes can also be made to the text description 21 of each elementary

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operation, and images and video films can be loaded from any bulk memory connected locally or remotely to control unit 3.

Unlike the unskilled-operator display 13, which only
5 shows the technical operations whose operating values VF have different states in current start configuration C1 and desired end configuration C2, display 13' for skilled operators with update-mode access shows a list 14' of all the technical operations to be performed on automatic
10 machine 1, regardless of the respective operating values VF.

In a further embodiment, control unit 3 has a network connection - typically operating to the Ethernet standard - by which a known user interface device (not
15 shown) can interact with control unit 3.

In this case, the user interface device comprises configuration database DBC, operation database DBI and the interface control logic to display "assisted configuration change" and/or "standard configuration
20 change" procedures. At the end of the "configuration change" procedure, the user interface communicates with control unit 3 in known manner to load the new control unit 3 operating parameters relative to the desired end configuration.